

EPA explains 'no-detect' again

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The EPA's recent announcement that construction of a motocross course may continue because soil samples came back no detect prompted a lengthy discussion Thursday night at the Community Advisory Group meeting.

CAG members questioned the safety of a no-detect finding.

"Rarely can you say that nothing is there," said Jim Christiansen, Superfund cleanup coordinator in Libby.

With polarized light microscopy the EPA can presently detect asbestos fibers at .1 percent to .2 percent levels in a test sample.

"I can guarantee there is not .1 percent to .2 percent but I can never guarantee

■ Research funding confab in D.C.

■ TAG doing final editing on book

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there is nothing," he said. "If we see a fiber, that's a trace and we clean it up as well."

All the samples at the proposed motocross site came back no detect, he said.

Les Skramstad expressed concern that no detect might mean there are fibers present but not seen.

"Dr. (Alan) Whitehouse repeatedly has said there is no such thing as a safe level of exposure to asbestos," Skramstad said.

He noted that volunteers put up 226

white crosses for Memorial Day services representing people who have died from asbestos-related disease.

"These are people who probably didn't know a fiber from a space ship," Skramstad continued. "Some of them were young people. Perhaps we need to relook at what's safe."

Christiansen said he's doing everything he can to clean up asbestos contamination left behind by more than 60 years of mining and milling tainted vermiculite.

"I don't want to see any more dead people," Christiansen said. "I want to clean it up. I wish there was a magic method to say I can measure to very fine levels but I can't."

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"We have plenty of detects to worry about and that's what we will focus on."

Christiansen said several hundred thousands of dollars are spent on improving the detection technology.

"When we have better method, we will incorporate it into our work plan," he said. "We're using the best stuff we can come up with."

In other cleanup actions, Christiansen said the EPA is working closely with W.R. Grace on cleanup of the Flyway

property up river. Grace will be doing the work with oversight by the EPA.

Also, Christiansen said he heard Burlington Northern-Santa Fe has submitted a revised cleanup plan for contamination along the railroad tracks.

While that existing contamination isn't causing a detectable problem, an earlier attempt to remove it did result in detectable asbestos fibers in the air. Work was stopped.

Christiansen said he hasn't seen the revised plan yet but expects to soon.